

Unhealthy habits cost Canadians six years of life

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Dr. Doug Manuel was senior author of a study that found that smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity, and unhealthy alcohol consumption contribute to about 50 percent of deaths in Canada. Credit: The Ottawa Hospital

Unhealthy habits are costing Canadians an estimated six years of life, according to a study published today in *PLOS Medicine*. Researchers found that smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity, and unhealthy alcohol consumption contribute to about 50 percent of deaths in Canada.

"Unhealthy behaviours place a major burden on Canadian life expectancies," said lead author Dr. Doug Manuel, senior scientist at The Ottawa Hospital and professor at The University of Ottawa, and a senior core scientist at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES).

"This study identified which behaviours pose the biggest threat."

Dr. Manuel and his team created an algorithm to analyze data from ICES and the Statistics Canada 2009-2010 Canadian Community Health Survey.

The study found:

- 26 per cent of all deaths are attributable to smoking
- 24 per cent of all deaths are attributable to physical inactivity
- 12 per cent of all deaths are attributable to poor diet
- 0.4 per cent of all deaths are attributable to unhealthy alcohol consumption

For men, smoking was the top risk factor, representing a loss of 3.1 years. For women it was lack of physical activity, representing a loss of 3 years.

The researchers also found that Canadians who followed recommended healthy behaviours had a life expectancy 17.9 years greater than individuals with the unhealthiest behaviours.

"We hope this algorithm can help improve public [health](#) planning in the 100 countries around the world which already use population health surveys," said Dr. Heather Manson, Chief of Health Promotion, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention at Public Health Ontario. "Unlike many other tools being used today, our method can measure life expectancy for specific socio-demographic groups or for small changes in risk exposure."

"Our approach is a new way of measuring the impact of health problems on life expectancy," said Dr. Manuel. "In an era of big data, we should be moving beyond the old methods that have remained largely unchanged for the past 60 years."

[An earlier Ontario-only study](#) led by Dr. Manuel and published by ICES in 2012 found unhealthy behaviours cost Ontarians 7.5 years of life.

Dr. Manuel and his team have also created an online calculator called [Project Big Life](#) to help Canadians estimate their own [life expectancy](#) based on habits and lifestyle choices.

More information: Measuring Burden of Unhealthy Behaviours Using a Multivariable Predictive Approach: Life Expectancy Lost in Canada Attributable to Smoking, Alcohol, Physical Inactivity, and Diet. Douglas G. Manuel, Richard Perez, Claudia Sanmartin, Monica Taljaard, Deirdre Hennessy, Kumanan Wilson, Peter Tanuseputro, Heather Manson, Carol Bennett, Meltem Tuna, Stacey Fisher, Laura C. Rosella. *PLOS Medicine*. August 16, 2016.

Provided by Ottawa Hospital Research Institute

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